



Naugatuck River Revival Group

132 Radnor Avenue
Naugatuck, CT 06770

March 4, 2022

Dear Co-Chairs Cohen and Gresko, Vice-Chairs Slap and Palm, Ranking Members Miner and Harding, and members of the Environment Committee,

On behalf of the Naugatuck River Revival Group (NRRG) located in Naugatuck I write to ask you to support Raised House Bill 5291, An Act Authorizing Bonding for Bikeways, Greenways and Recreational Trails.

This important bill would increase the bond authorization for the Recreational Trails and Greenways Grants program to \$6 million. As you may be aware, in Fall, 2021, DEEP issued a request for recreational trails proposals with only \$3 million available, and received 65 applications requesting over \$22 million. The \$3 million was granted to twenty worthy projects, but another \$7 million in highly ranked proposals were unable to be funded, and we expect the ongoing need for investments in Connecticut's outdoor recreation infrastructure to continue.

I have been involved with the Waterbury Greenway Advisory Committee (WGAC) and the Naugatuck River Greenway Committee (NRG) from their beginning. For over a decade I have been there for the conception, routing, planning and building - of some sections - with the vision of a 40-mile Naugatuck River Greenway always the goal. The Naugatuck River Greenway is being put together inch by inch, piece by piece, town by town with tremendous effort from the NVCOG and all stakeholders - including the NPS - being persistent and resilient over time. The cost of the total project is beyond any single funding source. However, the economic, social, environmental and health benefits to our citizens cannot be overestimated. An economic study of the Naugatuck River Greenway shows the financial benefits alone to the Naugatuck Valley estimated to be in excess of \$300 million.

It is no surprise to anyone that these processes can be complicated, slow and expensive. Putting all the pieces together requires coordinated accumulative funding. In the end, these recreational trails and greenways will benefit the health and contribute to the quality of life for the people all over Connecticut for generations.

The NRG is an ambitious project and has been worthy of every effort of many groups and individuals over the years.

This bill is important on many levels. For example, it is important for you to know that there is a parallel - but equally important synergist and Herculean effort - to restore the Naugatuck River. They will compliment and leverage each other. This effort is led by the Naugatuck River Restoration Coalition (Save the Sound,

Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments and Naugatuck River Revival Group). We are in the late stages to free over 32 miles of spawning and rearing habitat for diadromous fish that will enhance and run the length the Naugatuck River Greenway. This restoration project and the Naugatuck River Greenway are on a wonderful collision course. The benefits are beyond description. *When* these two projects meet and are actualized the State of Connecticut will have a new treasure to be proud of: *A forty-mile greenway along a free-flowing river.*

This is not just about building recreational trails and greenways it is without doubt about creating the quality of life we all need - where it counts - at the local level. The trails and greenways will connect us to the outdoors and the outdoors to us.

With your help and support the best is yet to come.

Please support this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,

Kevin Zak
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